



Courtesy Photo

Lang brings skill to Lincoln's Lied

By Josh Krauter

Senior editor

The Lied Center for the Performing Arts' Discovery! Series takes pride in bringing new performers to Lincoln.

But the latest performer in the series is not just new to performing, he's relatively new to the planet.

Lang Lang, a classical concert pianist, will perform at the Johnny Carson Theater tonight.

Lang began playing piano when he was 3. Now he's only 17, but he's already had the career of someone twice his age.

Lang was born in Shen Yang, China, and his family put him in music classes when he was 3.

"My family is a music family," Lang said. "They play traditional Chinese music."

Lang said he was one of the youngest students in his music classes, but not by much.

"I think at that time, I was the youngest, but many were only two years older," he said.

Even at that young age, Lang had an interest in learning the music.

"I really liked music at the time," he said.

When Lang was 9, he entered the China Central Music Conservatory. After only a few years there, he was accepted into the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying under famed pianist Gary Graffman.

It was the first time he had lived in the United States, but he had already played in the United States with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra when he was only 6 years old.

Lang said he enjoys living in the United States.

"I think it's a great country," he said. "I have my teacher here."

Lang said he was especially impressed that Graffman, who broke his right hand, plays with only his left

PREVIEW Lang Lang in Concert

WHERE: Lied Center for Performing Arts, 12th & Q Streets

WHEN: 8 p.m. tonight

COST: \$24, half price for students

THE SKINNY: Teenage pianist brings concert to Lincoln.

hand.

Lang will be playing four pieces by four major composers at the concert: Haydn, Chopin, Brahms and Rachmaninoff.

He said he picked the four for their stylistic differences.

The Haydn piece, "Sonata in E, Hob. XVI/31," is a rare treat, Lang said.

"It's very light music, a very lovely sonata," he said. "The sonata is not very well known. Most people probably haven't heard it."

The second piece, Chopin's "Sonata No. 3, in B Minor, Op. 58," is a crowd favorite, Lang said.

"It's very popular," he said. "Everybody plays it. It's such a beautiful melody. It has passion and is very exciting."

The Brahms piece, "Piano Pieces, Op. 118," is a diverse work, Lang said. He said the piece is made up of six parts, some strong, some deep, some puzzling and some light. The final work, Rachmaninoff's "Sonata No. 2, in B-Flat Minor, Op. 36," ends the concert in a bang, Lang said.

"It's exciting, like a storm or fireworks," he said.

Lang said he hasn't had an interest in learning instruments other than the piano because of his love for it.

"The piano has so many notes and so many sounds," he said. "It just has more interest for me."

Unrealistic romance leaves viewers bored

■ "Return to Me" gives viewers a ridiculous, 1950s-style story.

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

The mettle of movie reviewers is tested when they come across a film as thick with feel-good goo as "Return to Me."

There are few out there who wouldn't say this movie is more or less ridiculous. They do so at the peril of their reputation to readers, who will devour this junk in large quantities like hungry thieves.

Oh, there's some soft-hearted critics who might hold on to the old 1950s movie standard, when PG-rated romances like this came down the chute every week. That's what "Return to Me" is — a throwback, a movie that would love the Edsel.

With equal intensity, first-time director Bonnie Hunt also loves dogs, gorillas, old men, old nuns, flowers, Frank Sinatra, bicycles with baskets, family restaurants, little children and Rome.

I was half expecting to see June Lockhart in high heels or Doris Day share a croon or two.

All of this love adds up after a while. It sort of washed over me as unfunny and unromantic. It featured two leads (David Duchovny and Minnie Driver) who I had no real interest in knowing, because I do not care to know people without flaws.

Maybe some would like to, though, and that's probably why the surrounding

audience laughed at all the jokes and brushed away tears on cue. One thing is for sure: It's very hard not to root for perfect people who have been through such obvious tragedy.

Let's start with Bob (Duchovny), who loses his perfect gorilla-training wife (Joely Richardson) to an off-screen car accident, which we find out through one of the poorest jobs of editing in years.

Then there's Grace (Driver), a sickly woman in dire need of a heart transplant on the same day the gorilla woman kicks it. Put it together for yourself.

A year later, through circumstance, Grace and Bob meet at the Irish-Italian restaurant owned by Grace's grandfather (Carroll O'Connor, in thick brogue). A courtship inevitably begins.

Both are surrounded by wonderful, supportive friends. Grace, because she is still vulnerable, has an even larger support system of her grandfather and his cronies, who take time out of their day to play matchmakers and debate the skills of Dean Martin and Bobby Darin. They do this all while peeking through the blinds to make sure Bob and Grace get along.

Hunt shows up as Grace's friend, and she has a few decent moments with her on-screen husband, James Belushi, who's about as good as he's been in years.

The story is driven by what might be called the idiot plot, as all misunderstandings could be cleared up by one simple statement — and would be cleared up in real life. Instead, we get an extended, listless scene in a bowling alley.

REVIEW Return to Me

STARRING: David Duchovny, Minnie Driver
DIRECTOR: Bonnie Hunt
RATING: R (minor language)
GRADE: C-
FIVE WORDS: Feel-good and pure fantasy.

I dunno. There's nothing really wrong with making a movie that will offend no one on the surface — one sans the female subjugation and useless sex romps prevalent in teen romantic comedies. It's sentimental and cute. And there's nothing horribly offensive about either Duchovny or Driver, as both have their moments, though Duchovny looks visibly pained in a few scenes.

But "Return to Me" takes no chances, and purposefully so; it remains absolute in its cheeriness. Not one major or minor character is anything but pure golden sunshine underneath. It's the movies — yes, but the era of escapism ended long ago. "Return to Me" borders on pure fantasy.

Yet there are many people who will embrace this movie — who will follow these characters through every contrived plot device Hunt has in her bag. Here is a movie made for the eternal optimist who might be having a bad day and needs a boost to reaffirm that, yes, all is right with our fine world, and fate is always the angel in our corner.

Just don't count me among them.



Courtesy Photo